**What should an introduction do?**

Whatever you are writing—an essay, a report, an article, a thesis, a journal, a literature review, or any other piece of academic writing—the introduction will be the first thing the reader sees. If an introduction is poorly written or constructed, if it is boring, if it does not tell readers what they need to know, if it does not help readers to orient themselves to your paper—then you have lost your readers' goodwill right from the beginning, and can be sure of losing marks, no matter how well the rest of the assignment is constructed.

It’s essential, then, that you get the introduction right. This means that you must know what the introduction is supposed to do, what sorts of things must go into the introduction, how to write and structure the introduction properly, and how to interest your reader from the start.

**An introduction should do the following:**

* alert a reader’s interest
* indicate the scope and direction of the paper, and act as a navigation guide to its reading.
* show the reader how you are interpreting and approaching the question
* provide a context for the main issue
* indicate the focus of the paper
* indicate your conclusion and point of view

**A typical introduction**

Below is an introduction which would be suitable for a 1500-2000 word essay on intercultural communication. This introduction will be analysed to show its content and structure.

**Question:** Workplace diversity is now recognised as an important feature in organisations, especially in multicultural nations like Australia. What communication problems might arise in a culturally diverse workplace, and how can managers best deal with them?

Over the past twenty five years, since Australia embraced multiculturalism as a policy, issues of intercultural communication have become more and more prominent in the workplace. However, until relatively recently, little had been written on these issues, and even now, many organisational managers have no training or knowledge of how to deal with communication problems, even though most workplaces are staffed by people of diverse cultures. Particular problem areas include the difficulties that some non-English speakers have in understanding safety instructions (figures produced by the ABS in 1997 show that migrant workers have a higher incidence of accidents at the workplace); an ignorance of the different forms of non-verbal communication used by other cultures (for example it is considered impolite in some societies for an employee to look directly at his or her employer), which can lead to misunderstandings and unpleasantness; and the lack of knowledge about differing expectations. From interviews with managers and staff in six organisations (public and commercial), it can be seen there are three problem areas and that many of the difficulties faced by both natives and migrants in the workforce are caused by a lack of awareness of, and training in, intercultural communication. *(About 190 words)*

**The Content of an Introduction**

Always remember this: in academic writing, *nothing must come as a surprise to the reader*. Academic writing is not like fiction writing, where the reader can be held in suspense, not knowing who committed the crime, or whether the girl will get the boy, or whether the story will end happily or tragically.

In academic writing, the whole ‘story’ is outlined in the introduction, and given in detail in the body.

Remember this too: in academic writing, *everything must follow logically from a starting point*. It is unlike fiction, where accidental happenings can change the direction of the story with unexpected twists and turns.

In academic writing, there can be no twists and turns; the logical direction of the argument is indicated in the introduction, and followed faithfully in the body.

Any introduction must contain the following:

* Brief, relevant background information and/or other contextualising material
* An essay map
* A thesis statement
* Your point of view

These are described below.

**Brief, relevant background information**

Providing background information or other contextualising material shows how your topic fits into a broader framework, and what approach you are taking. By doing this, you can point your readers in the direction you want them to go; you can also show them why the topic is significant.

‘Brief’ and ‘relevant’ are the important words. Don’t give your reader too much context— give just enough (often only a couple of sentences is ample for a 1500-2000 word assignment) to place the key issue of your assignment in its context.

In the introduction above, a brief background of the topic is provided in the first two sentences.

Over the past twenty five years, since Australia embraced multiculturalism as a policy, issues of intercultural communication have become more and more prominent in the workplace. However, until relatively recently, little had been written on these issues, and even now, many organisational managers have no training or knowledge of how to deal with communication problems, even though most workplaces are staffed by people of diverse cultures.

These two sentences briefly put the focus of the assignment within its historical context, and show the reader why there is a problem. It is not necessary to give more background information in the introduction to a short essay.